

January 8, 2007

Climate Change: No Time to Debate (6 Letters)

To the Editor:

Re “Middle Stance Emerges in Debate Over Climate” (news article, Jan. 1):

Do we know for certain when and how much Greenland and the West Antarctic Ice Sheet will melt with global warming, and the exact amount the sea level will rise as a result? Or how intense heat waves, droughts, floods and storms will become?

The answer is no, it is not possible to make exact predictions about such complex systems.

But there is no uncertainty among the world’s leading scientists that if we do not significantly reduce our current levels of burning fossil fuels, our world will experience profound changes, many of them irreversible, in its physical, chemical and biological composition.

And there is absolutely no question that these changes will severely threaten life, including human life, on this planet. It would be shamefully ignorant and morally inexcusable if we did not do everything in our power to prevent these changes from occurring.

Political leaders, policy makers and the public should not be misled by the few scientists who persistently emphasize the uncertainties of climate science, as if these uncertainties guaranteed that global warming consequences would not be catastrophic.

Eric Chivian, M.D.

Boston, Jan. 2, 2007

The writer is director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School.

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To the Editor:

The middle stance views climate change as a potential risk and responds in ways akin to buying fire insurance, as described in your article. This is classic public health policy.

Climate change may or may not bring heat waves, more severe hurricanes, an increase in tropical diseases, worsening air pollution, compromised food supplies and other threats to life and health. But as long as credible scientific evidence points to these possibilities, as it does, protecting the public requires that we anticipate and prepare for them.

Similar logic motivates us to vaccinate against influenza, remove lead paint, use seat belts and treat high blood pressure.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is committed to addressing the public-health consequences of climate change, which is preparedness at its best.

Howard Frumkin, M.D.

Atlanta, Jan. 3, 2007

The writer is director of the National Center for Environmental Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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To the Editor:

One issue on climate change, which is alluded to in this article, is the public's apparent lack of interest in the topic. This probably stems from the inconvenience that is required in solving the global warming problem.

Conserving natural resources or switching to alternative energy would be quite cumbersome for a society accustomed to overindulgence. It is imperative, however, that we realize that other solutions are available and will need to be explored.

These solutions include such energy forms as hydropower and geothermal, wind and nuclear power, which have all shown to be viable remedies in other areas of the world. It is also important to realize that the inconvenience of exploring these solutions will only accumulate if the problem is ignored.

Nick Tataryn

Philadelphia, Jan. 2, 2007

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To the Editor:

The article about the global warming debate claims to identify an intermediate position between President Bush's refusal to acknowledge the reality of climate change and the view, articulated by Al Gore in his documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," that such change poses a clear and present danger to human life.

This is not, however, what the article does. Rather, on every major point, starting with the question of whether climate change is an established scientific finding, the middle stance agrees with the Gore position and rejects the Bush deception. The notion that the truth is midway between two poles of debate is a longstanding American myth, but it does not work in this case.

While neither "An Inconvenient Truth" nor the so-called middle stance is the final word on climate

change, both are responsible efforts to get at the truth. By contrast, skepticism about global warming is a position unmoored from reality.

Daniel A. Segal

Claremont, Calif., Jan. 1, 2007

The writer is an anthropology professor at Pitzer College.

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To the Editor:

While there is diversity in the views of climate scientists about the imminence of threats, there is near unanimity that the risks posed by global warming are genuine and potentially very serious.

The real dispute over what should be done is between responsible scientists and the Bush administration, whose policy on climate change has been to acknowledge little and do almost nothing.

Russ Weiss

Princeton, N.J., Jan. 1, 2007

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To the Editor:

Regarding the article about the climate change debate, I can only say that it is about time.

The debate simply detracts from the major issue, which is that dumping toxins into the atmosphere simply can't be good. I am sure that all the debate's participants care very much about their personal hygiene. It is time to improve our own public hygiene.

Alan Schulman

Colorado Springs, Jan. 1, 2007

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